



# Advancement of Women

"I am from Britain and think it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decision-making of my country. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men. But sadly I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights"

~ UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson, 2014

## OVERVIEW

Gender inequality is an issue that every nation faces in varying degrees. As of 2014, no nation had reached full **gender equality** by completely eliminating their gender gap. Even the countries that are able to boast the highest equality rates only have closed about 80% of their gender gaps, and have much progress to be made in giving women the same rights and opportunities that men have.<sup>1</sup> There are numerous factors that influence gender inequalities, making it difficult to come up with a solution that will help every nation amend oppressive ideals stemming from their religions, cultural norms, and gender expectations.

It must be noted that inequality exists in different forms. The **gender gap** can be a result of different wages offered for the same job. It can emerge when a similarly qualified man and woman find that they have different chances of being hired for a job, and the woman is automatically and sometimes unconsciously not considered for a position in a male dominated field. **Gender inequality** is evident in the fact that women are twice as likely as men in South Africa to contract HIV/AIDS.<sup>2</sup> It is also visible in the lack of freedom and rights child brides have regarding marriage in parts of South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East.<sup>3</sup>

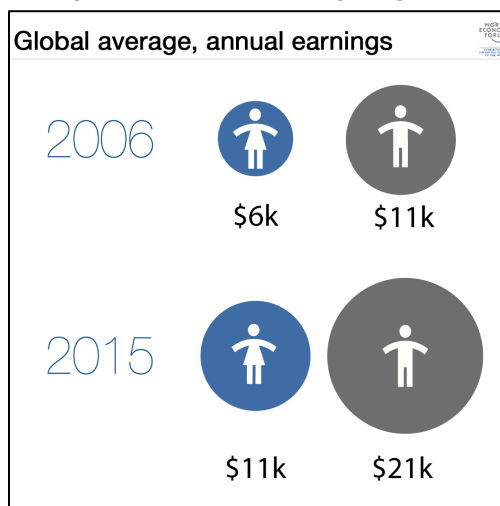


Figure 1 – Global Gender Gap Report 2015

## HISTORY OF THE ISSUE

Gender inequality was addressed on a global scale for the first time in 1945 in the UN Charter, which called for "the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small" in its preamble.<sup>4</sup> The UN followed the charter with the Universal Declaration of

<sup>1</sup> *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*. Rep. World Economic Forum, 2014. Web. 01 July 2015, p 46

<sup>2</sup> "HIV & AIDS in South Africa." *Avert.com*. N.p., 2012. Web. 01 July 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Theiss-Nyland, Katherine. "Reaching Child Brides." (1998): n. pag. *The Partnership Of Maternal, Newborn and Child Health*. PMNCH, 2012. Web. 1 July 2015.

<sup>4</sup> "United Nations Charter." *UN News Center*. UN, n.d. Web. 01 July 2015.



Human Rights and declared: "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."<sup>5</sup> While today these documents seem taken for granted, in 1945 it was monumental in the fact that it formally called for all nations to ensure that both males and female were required to be treated equally.<sup>6</sup>

In 1960, Siramavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon, later Sri Lanka, became the first female Prime Minister in the world.<sup>7</sup> Women gradually came to hold more positions of power and became heads of state globally, with the election of India's Indira Gandhi's in 1966 and Israel's Golda Meir in 1969.<sup>8</sup> This time was critical for women's political rights, as 70 countries granted women the right to vote in the twenty years between 1950 and 1970. Celebrating this progress, the UN declared March 8<sup>th</sup> as National Women's Day in 1977.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2 - Siramayo Bandaranaike, the first female Prime Minister

## FOCUS AREAS

### ***Reducing Poverty and Food Scarcity***

Globally, women and girls make up 60% of the underfed and malnourished population. Many studies have shown that a key to reducing poverty and hunger levels worldwide is the empowerment of women. In many countries, women are critical to managing food production and feeding their families. Traditional practices, cultural norms and laws in some countries limit opportunities for women to either work or own land. Additionally, women may not have enough power in the household to do certain tasks, implement new methods of farming or seek outside work to lift a family out of poverty. Improving circumstances that otherwise would limit a woman's decision-making power in a household or community is very important to reducing poverty in an area.<sup>10</sup>

Proper nutrition is linked directly with maternal health and disease prevention. Traditional feeding and caregiving practices tend to favor boys over girls, which can lead to malnutrition and developmental issues in women later in life. Additionally, when women are malnourished during pregnancy their babies have more of a likelihood of being born with delayed mental or physical development.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR, Declaration of Human Rights, Human Rights Declaration, Human Rights Charter, The Un and Human Rights." *UN News Center*. UN, n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Figure 1. "Sirimavo R.D. Bandaranaike." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>7</sup> "International Women's Day Timeline", [http://www. "International Women's Day - World Bank Group."](http://www. 'International Women's Day - World Bank Group.') *International Women's Day - World Bank Group*. The World Bank Group, n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>8</sup> A Brief History of the World's First Three Female Prime Ministers, "Indira." *Algemeinercom RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.[first-three-female-prime-ministers/#](http://www. 'International Women's Day - World Bank Group.')

<sup>9</sup> International Women's Day Timeline", [http://www. "International Women's Day - World Bank Group."](http://www. 'International Women's Day - World Bank Group.') *International Women's Day - World Bank Group*. The World Bank Group, n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Figure 2. Wainwright, Richard. "Afghanistan-Girls' Education - Richard Wainwright Photography." *Richard Wainwright Photography Afghanistan Girls Education Comments*. N.p., 20 Dec. 2013. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>11</sup> "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment." *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals New Gender Mainstreaming Series on Development Issues* (2003): 169-95. Asian Development Bank, 2013. Web. 24 July 2015.



## **Improving Education**

The Millennium Development Goals, created in 2000 by the United Nations, highlight the importance of early childhood development interventions. Globally, both boys and girls are enrolling more frequently in primary schools. However, once girls hit secondary school, their enrollment rate drops dramatically. According to the World Bank, an extra year of secondary school education may eventually increase a girl's future earnings by up to 20%.<sup>12</sup> Much of the focus of female education centers on keeping girls in school past the required primary years, and eventually increasing their enrollment in trade schools or universities. A study using data from 219 countries from 1970 to 2009, found that for every one additional year of education for women of reproductive age, child mortality decreased by 9.5%.<sup>13</sup>

Education for girls and women is one of the most important and effective solutions to gender inequality. As of 2010, women made up two thirds of all the population worldwide who were illiterate. This statistic has not improved for approximately two decades. Literacy is critical to business owning, community involvement and voting, along with many other basic skills. Women who can read are more likely to teach their children and ensure that their families are able to have a basic education.



Figure 3 - A 9 year old attends secondary school in Eastern Afghanistan

## **Expanding Health, Family and Maternal Care**

Women's health care is an area that is typically overlooked in developing countries. Women who are not introduced to proper health education before becoming pregnant may receive misinformation or participate in traditional rituals that are damaging to their own health and the health of their children. Community expectations and cultural norms encouraging women to have many children and start families young have huge impacts on opportunities for women. Marriage and child bearing before a woman completes their education may limit career opportunities, and result in poor maternal health from repeated and frequent births. Caring for the children after birth and managing the house is typically expected of women after marriage and prevents many women from returning to school or seeking a career.<sup>14 15</sup>

Educating women on how to care for themselves and their families efficiently increases the likelihood that women are able to continue their lives and potentially work outside the home while effectively raising their children. Many countries have implemented maternity and even paternity leave requirements to ensure that women are able to balance a career and the household. Governments have started to encourage women

<sup>12</sup>"Millennium Development Goals." *The World Bank*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Economic empowerment – UN Women - <http://www2.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#sthash.h9IZrDQv.dpuf>

<sup>14</sup> Cheung, Paul. "Executive Summary." *The World's Women 2010 Trends and Statistics*. New York: United Nations, 2010. IX-VII. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2012. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>15</sup>Figure 3. Abbas, Ali. "Iraq's Fragile Democracy." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 1 May 2014. Web. 24 July 2015.



to postpone marriage until they complete their secondary and even tertiary education. Many international organizations and NGOs are promoting the use of contraceptives to keep girls in school and prevent dangerous childbirth.<sup>16</sup>

### **Increasing Women in Politics and Business to Eliminate Gender Gap**

Studies have shown that one of the best ways to close the gender inequality gap is to integrate women into the workforce. This not only increases the involvement of women in the nation, but also increases the competitiveness of a nation in the global market. As women make up half the population of a country, nations and companies are not using all the resources at their disposal if they are not including women in business and manufacturing jobs.

When elected as government and community leaders, women are more likely to prioritize family life, health and education than their male counterparts. Additionally, increasing the amount of women in politics is correlated with the amount of women in business, suggesting that more political representation may lead to more female workers due to more policies promoting women's rights in the workforce. Female representation in politics may lead to non-discriminatory legislation, increased paternity and maternity leave, and general encouragement of women's education.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 4 - Iraqi women display their purple thumbs after voting in the 2014 elections

According to Global Gender Gap Report of 2015, since 2006, an extra quarter of a billion women have entered the labor force. However, the annual pay for women only now equals the amount men were earning ten years ago. In May 2015, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told participants that it is clear that achieving gender equality will require the concerted efforts of the private sector. There are many examples of companies that are taking real steps to close the gender gap, Mr. Ban said. Examples include: global electrical energy company linking gender diversity performance with financial bonuses, a sanitation company in India headed by a female CEO making bio-friendly toilets available to poor communities, a Turkish bank designing products to support women entrepreneurs, and a renewable energy company in Brazil setting up a domestic violence support system.

### **Decreasing Violence Against Women**

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."<sup>18</sup> Recent statistics showed that between 15% of women in Japan and 71% of women in Ethiopia reported physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Around 11.5% of women reported sexual

<sup>16</sup> "Family Planning / Contraception." WHO. United Nations, May 2015. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>17</sup> "The Case for Gender Equality." *Global Gender Gap Report 2014*. World Economic Forum, n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Violence against women - WHO - <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>





violence by someone other than a partner. The first sexual experience for many women was reported as forced.<sup>19</sup>

Violence against women is an issue that generates risk factors, such as health consequences, impact on their children, and socio-economic risks. Currently, there are organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), which is collaborating with other international organizations and partners to strengthen research and projects to tackle partner violence. Decreasing violence against women allows them to be psychologically and physically capable of joining the workforce and gives them the courage and confidence to attend school.

## INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

**The United Nations** has held multiple conferences discussing the gender gap and ways to reduce gender inequality. The first of these discussions was held in 1975 in Mexico City. For this conference, 133 governments sent representatives to discuss guidelines for ways that nations could improve the status of women. Similar conferences were held in Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. At the 1995 conference, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was published. This document covered twelve major areas of concerns, and was signed by representatives of 189 countries. It outlines actions that each signing government should be taking both internationally and internally. In 2000, the United Nations' General Assembly held a "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development, and Peace for the Twenty-First Century" session to follow up of the Beijing Declaration. Reviews of the document have taken place every five years since 2000.<sup>20</sup> In the year 2010, the UN General Assembly created **UN Women**, an entity that focuses exclusively to fight for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

**The Millennium Development Goals** were also produced in 2000, and many of the 8 goals had direct links to women's empowerment. By 2015, the United Nations hoped to make strides to ensure that both girls and boys had the opportunity for universal primary education, promote gender equality, and improve maternal health. Much progress has been made towards these goals, especially the first goal to reduce hunger and poverty. It is expected that these goals will be updated or revised in the upcoming year.

## BLOC POSITIONS

It is very difficult for countries to bond together in groups because of the fact that every nation has different individual issues and priorities to combat. There is no nation or group of nations that have reached complete equality; there are only nations that are more progressive than others. Religion can also play a large part in the traditions practiced which influence equality. Nations that have similar official religions or have incorporated religious teachings in their laws may notice trends in their inequality issues that are similar. Below are the regions with significant gender disparities.

### **Asia and The Pacific**

Gender gaps in economic participation have not made progress for more than 20 years in Asia and the Pacific. In South Asia the gap reaches to nearly 50%. According to the Asian Development Bank, more women die in South Asia due to childbirth complications than in any other part of the world after Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, in Pakistan a half kilometer increase in the distance to school will decrease girls' enrolment by 20%. The amount of deliveries attended by skilled birth attendants is as low as 18% in Bangladesh,

<sup>19</sup> "Violence Against Women." WHO. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>

<sup>20</sup> "World Conferences on Women." *World Conferences on Women*. UN Women, n.d. Web. 24 July 2015.



19% in Nepal, and 20% in the Laos. Gender inequality in wages remains the same, with women typically earning 70% to 90% less of the male wage. Many Asian women report experiencing physical violence from their intimate partners; 30% of women in Viet Nam; 40% in Bangladesh, Samoa, and Timor-Leste; and more than 60% in Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.<sup>21</sup>

### **Arab/Middle East**

Social indicators and world statistics shows how women in the Arab world are on average more disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially compared to women in other regions of the world. Even though the Middle East are at the same economical stage and income levels than Latin America, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Even though the region has the advantage over other parts of the world with the oil wealth and urbanization; education levels, and literacy are very low, especially in the women adult population. In the Global Gender Gap Index, the countries with the worst gender equality measures include Yemen, Syria, Iran, Lebanon, and Jordan. In 2010, the World Bank conducted a survey of women graduating from community colleges in Jordan. Approximately 90% of them were going to look for work, but a follow up survey one year later the studies showed that among the graduates who had already married, only 7% were employed. In Yemen, there is a local saying: "To educate a woman is wrong because she has no place but her husband's home."<sup>22</sup>

### **Africa**

Significant progress has been made in closing gender gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa. By 2008, there were 91 girls for every 100 boys in primary school. And at 61%, women in Sub-Saharan Africa have one of the highest labor force participation rates in the world. Despite these gains, African women continue to face disadvantages over men. Girls are still much less likely than boys to acquire a secondary education. An African woman faces a 1 in 31 chance of dying from complications due to pregnancy or childbirth, compared to a 1 in 4,300 chance in the developed world.<sup>23</sup> Countries in North Africa are among the countries that are at the bottom of the Global Gender Gap Index. The five lowest-ranked countries from the region are Ethiopia, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Chad. All five countries are also among the lowest-ranked countries on literacy rate and enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education, Chad, being the lowest ranked in the region. Mali ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest on the Healthy Life Expectancy Indicator and it is also the country with the highest total fertility rate, as well as, the highest adolescent fertility rate.

### **Latin America**

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), despite significant progress over the past decades, gender equality remains a challenge in Latin America, where women study more than men, but later found out that they earn less than men when they join the workforce. Labor participation of women in Latin American has increased from 49.2% in 2000 to 52.9% in 2010, but it is still below men [articipation, which is 79.6%. By contrast, the rate of female unemployment, at 9.1%, remains higher than that of men, at

<sup>21</sup> Asian Development Bank - <http://www.adb.org/features/12-things-know-2012-gender-equality>

<sup>22</sup> UNDP - Towards Gender Equality in the Arab/Middle East Region - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/towards-gender-equality-arabmiddle-east-region>

<sup>23</sup> World Bank - Improving Gender Equality in Africa - <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/brief/improving-gender-equality-in-africa>



6.3%. In addition, women face longer hours because they have to devote time for work and family care.<sup>24</sup> The World Bank estimates that in the last 20 years, over 70 million women have joined the workforce, reducing extreme poverty in the region by 30% in the past decade.

## **North America and Europe**

In contrast to developing countries, developed countries are more focused on eliminating the gender gaps that exist on the workplace. Canada is committed to the belief that gender equality is not only a human rights concern, but is also an essential component of sustainable development, social justice, peace, and security. This is explicitly recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, gender pay gap remains an issue around the world, even in the United States. According to public information collected by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the global gender pay gap ranges from 3% to 51% with a global average of 17%. In terms of women in leadership positions, in 2009 only 24% of CEOs in the US were women and they earned 74.5% as much as male CEOs.<sup>26</sup> In 2012, the EU gender gap average is estimated at 16.4%. Under the EU rules, people who have suffered such discrimination can take legal action without fear of retaliation from their employer. Germany, Austria, Czech Republic and Estonia had a gap of 20% or more, while Spain, Hungary, Slovakia, Finland and the United Kingdom were all above the EU average.

## **CASE STUDY**

### ***Saudi Arabia: Rights of Driving and Education***<sup>27</sup>



Figure 5: Saudi School girls are not allowed to drive themselves to school

Saudi Arabia's official laws do not allow women to drive or ride in cars driven by men they are not related to. This has made it difficult for young girls to get to school, as they cannot ride on buses that are driven by men. Grown women are not able to get to universities or work without a man's formal permission, and the driving ban means that a man has to drive them to these locations as well.<sup>28</sup> These laws severely impact the opportunities available to women in the working world. The movement for driving rights

started in 2011, even though the law has not change, Saudi women showed how regulations in the country are unfair.

<sup>24</sup>International Labour Organization - [http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/comment-analysis/WCMS\\_237488/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/comment-analysis/WCMS_237488/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>25</sup> Canada's commitment to gender equality - <http://www.international.gc.ca/rights-droits/women-femmes/equality-egalite.aspx?lang=eng>

<sup>26</sup> ILO - [http://www.ilo.org/washington/areas/gender-equality-in-the-workplace/WCMS\\_159496/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/washington/areas/gender-equality-in-the-workplace/WCMS_159496/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>27</sup> Figure 5. *Saudi Prince Supports Women Driving*. Digital image. CNN. N.p., 5 May 2013. Web. 24 July 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Fisher, Max. "Saudi Arabia's Oppression of Women Goes Way beyond Its Ban on Driving." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 28 Oct. 2013. Web. 24 July 2015.



While Saudi Arabia on paper does grant the right of education to both males and females equally, the reality is that girls have difficulty pursuing an education. The laws and customs of Saudi Arabia interfere with the realities of the opportunities that women have to go to school and get careers. Situations like this one shows the realities that gender inequality have on women in a country. Moreover, Saudi women are taught from an early age that they are restricted to do ordinary activities, such as answering a phone, listening to music, or going to a mixed-gender mall.

Achieving equality means going beyond legislation, although making new laws is certainly the first step. Nations must discover new ways to ensure that their citizens accept progressive laws and make it safe for women to explore the opportunities that come from them. It does Saudi Arabia's women little good to know they have the right to go to school if they are barred from the transportation that allows them to claim this right.

## MAJOR RESEARCH SITES

### **The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women**

About UN Women

<http://www2.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women>

### **Millennium Development Goals**

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

### **The United Nations Population Fund**

Reports and News on Gender Equality

<http://www.unfpa.org/gender-equality>

### **The World Health Organization**

WHO - Gender, Equity and Human Rights

<http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/en/>

### **The World Bank**

Gender Data Portal

<http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/>

### **International Labour Organization**

Data and Labor Statistics on Equality and Discrimination

<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/equality-and-discrimination/gender-equality/lang--en/index.htm>

### **World Economic Forum**

The Global Gender Gap Index Results in 2014

<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/part-1/the-global-gender-gap-index-results-in-2014/>